19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

681 sanction of the recognized marriage ceremonies were ostracized to
684 the extent of having to live outside of the village stockade or, if
736 they belonged to a community living in a single village-house, they were required to occupy a room detached from the main building.
681 The two other classes of ostracized persons, namely, widows and
761 orphans, were supposed to have incurred the displeasure of their "Bgha," and it was feared that their misfortune would become
774 contagious if they were allowed to remain in the village. That is, the "Bgha" of other families would imitate the "Bgha" of the widows' and orphans' families in eating the "k'las" of other husbands and parents, thus depriving the village of more of its members. It was believed that this danger could be avoided by driving the bereft ones into the jungle to shift for themselves. The added risk of the future marriage of these baneful persons was taken into account. This was perhaps negligible in the case of the widows, but the orphans should not be allowed to grow up with other children to become in time eligible for marriage with them. Left to range through the jungle, such orphans, if they survived, generally developed a daring and resourcefulness that inspired the ordinary folk of the village with wonder. Their deeds came to be thought of
[791] as due to a supernatural power. In short, they were believed to be magicians.[1]

Family Relationships

595 In the chapter on Marriage Customs mention is made of the
587 general chastity of the Karen and of their monogamous marriages within the tribe. The rule is for a man to have one wife; but now and then a secondary wife or concubine, known as a "ma po tha," is supported. It may be that on account of the childlessness of the first wife the new connection has been entered into for the sake of offspring, or that the man has simply followed his own inclinations in the matter. Such unions are effected without the formality of marriage ceremonies and are not recognized by Karen society, being entirely irregular.

584 Westerners, accustomed as they are to doing their own courting, sometimes wonder how happy marriages can be effected in the case of young men and women who are strangers and have never met perhaps till they come together in the marriage chamber. We must remember, however, that with a people like the Karen the physical relationship is more significant than the spiritual. Senti-

[1] See Chapter XXVI, pp. 268-276.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1916) 1923 APT Burma
Karen APT

[783] 684 671 241

appease the Lord of heaven and earth and to find out the guilty persons.

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On the subject of stealing the exhortation of the elders was not to steal, destroy, defraud, or act dishonestly. Such deeds are by no means secret. Even though unconfessed, they become manifest in the ordeal by water and in that of ascending a tree. The God of heaven sees. The Lord of the mountains and hills, "Thi Hko Mü Xa," sees. If one is hungry, one should work, should bend the back. If one wants fish, one should use the hand-net. If one desires game, let one repair to the jungle for it. Families are to be fed in this way, not by stealing or by running into debt.

A person who had been caught stealing might be let off, if it was his first offense and he restored the stolen property and promised to reform. If, however, he became a confirmed thief, he was sold into slavery. In some parts of the Toungoo district it was not uncommon for one guilty of stealing to pay the penalty with his life. If positive proof was lacking and there was doubt as to his guilt, the ordeal by water was resorted to.

682 538

Murder was, of course, utterly condemned in the sayings of the elders, for "man is not like the beasts. He has a Lord and Master. We are the children of Thi Hko, of Y'wa who created us. Therefore, do not kill one another." The murderer will be surrendered to the Lord of the lands and will be put to death. He can not escape. His body will be left naked in the fields, and the vultures will devour it. "These things," the elders declare, "have we seen with our own eyes, and we know them, and they have often happened among us." However, the circumstances under which a murder was committed were taken into account. A homicide at a drunken feast was considered an accident, for it was thought that the one guilty of the crime would not have committed it had he been sober. No cause for an action existed in such a case.

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Men killed while taking part in a foray were to be redeemed, that is, a fine was to be paid for them, unless the leader had been excused from such payment in advance.[4] Likewise, the accidental death of a man during a trading, hunting, or other trip undertaken at the request of another, was chargeable to the latter, because otherwise it would not have occurred.

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The recognized way of bringing to justice an offender who was accused of causing the death of another, was for the near relatives

[4] See p. 157.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER XX

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

When a Karen is ill, his sickness is thought to be due to some action of the malevolent spirits of the unseen world or to the wandering of his "k'la" (life principle or psyche). His malady may be due to an accident, an attack of indigestion after eating too many green mangoes, or an infection of some sort; but, according to his belief, some invisible spirit has been offended by a slight and is the real cause of his disorder.[1]

The seven-fold "k'la," which presides over the life of every person from the time of his birth, will, the Karen believes, determine the time and manner of that person's death. Notwithstanding the fact that one or another of the many causes of death will sometime effect the dissolution of every member of the race, the Karen makes offerings to delay as long as possible the inevitable end. Most propitiatory feasts require the presence of every immediate member of the family, in order to render the feasts acceptable to the spirits. If the sick person seems to be sinking, his relatives will all remain and try to be at hand when he breathes his last.

Karen funerals are by no means solemn occasions. On the contrary, they afford the greatest opportunity for the people to enjoy themselves. I have heard it said that when a considerable time has elapsed since a death in a particular region, the young people long for someone to die, so that they may have a jolly time. The question has often been raised why the Karen, who are not without family affection, conduct themselves in what to Occidentals is a very unseemly manner at the funerals of their dearly beloved ones. Possibly some light is thrown on this question by the story of the fabulous White Python. According to this story, after the python had been compelled to release "Naw Mü E," it took vengeance by killing men in great numbers by discharging its venom on their footprints. It took pleasure in hearing of the suffering and sorrow it was causing the human race and, therefore, redoubled its efforts. The peo-

[1] See Chapter XXIII, pp. 239-245, and Chapter XXIV, pp. 249-254, 257.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

764 773 ple, fearing lest they should become extinct, sought to overcome the python by guile. They determined to try the plan of deceiving the serpent and its menials by ostentatious feasting and festivity when a person died through its malevolence, instead of mourning over the victim. This subterfuge proved to be successful, for the servants of the python reported to their master that the people were no longer succumbing to its poison, but were rejoicing over their newly won immunity. At this the enraged serpent discharged all of its venom and thereby lost the power it had formerly possessed of causing the death of human beings.

761 This tale reveals the Karen's profound fear of the mysterious causes of death. He is unacquainted with the modern sciences of physiology, pathology, hygiene, etc. Some unknown power removes his parents or his children, and he strives to fortify himself against it. The White Python of the tale typifies the evil spirits, who are continually lying in wait for him and the members of his family. His object seems to be to counteract their baneful influence, even in the hour of its manifestation, by concealing his sorrow and indulging in ceremonial feasting and forced hilarity. Such appears to be the significance of the story of "Naw Mü E" and the fabulous White Python.

764 The people have their own explanations of their mode of conducting funerals. One is that certain of their sports assist the spirit of the departed to avoid the pitfalls in his path as he journeys from this world to his proper place in the next. They are employing the appropriate means "to make his way cool," as they express it. Being inhabitants of a tropical region, the word "cool" is the Karen's synonym for comfortable and pleasant. Another explanation given by the Karen for his method of conducting funerals is that he aims to cheer the hearts of those who are bereaved. Being without a solace to overcome the sting of death, the mourners are the more ready to fill their minds with such absorbing sights and sounds as will expel the sad remembrance of their loss. The reaction comes later, but the Karen's habit of living in the present has enabled him to reduce that to a minimum.

When a person dies, the relatives, if not all present, are immediately called by sounding the big bronze drum or "klo a' ko" (the hot drum or drum of discomfort). The pounding of this drum communicates to everyone within hearing the news that a death has taken place, just as the tolling of a church bell in the early days of New England carried the tidings of death to the villagers. For a

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

In some sections of the country the village elders try to keep the children away from the dead, lest their "k'las" should be induced to follow its "k'la." In order to divert the attention of the latter from prevailing on the shade of some living person to follow it, the elders pretend to pick up fruit about the room where the body is lying and to put it into the skirts of their garments.

In the Pegu Hills it is customary to prepare a bier for the body. This is a low bamboo frame ("thi hso law") with a bamboo framework above, over which a blanket or several garments are spread to form a canopy ("ta t' su"). By this means the spirit is supposed to be assured a cool and shady journey to its next abode. The body is usually kept only from one to three days, at the end of which time bits of the finger and toe-nails are pared off and a lock of the hair is cut to be placed in a tiny mat and substituted for the corpse during the remaining days of the funeral rites, and the "mourners" march around them as they would around the corpse itself.

A ceremony, called "ta le me" or the lighting of the way, takes place in the evening. The Karen people seem to think of the realm of death as quite the reverse of this world. I have sometimes thought that they locate it beneath the earth, but am not sure whether they ascribe a location to it or not. Their conception of the conditions prevailing in the other sphere as opposed to those existing in this one, is shown by the following observance: Two young men take their places on opposite sides of the corpse, one holding a candle between his first and second fingers, as a cigar is held, the palm of the hand being downward. He passes the candle to his fellow, who passes it back, the recipient taking it between the third and fourth digits. The candle is then thrown down beneath the house, while the young men raise their hands and point to the sky, saying to the corpse: "The roots of your trees are there," and then to the ground with the words: "There are the tops of your trees." Pointing in the direction of the source of the neighboring stream, they call it the mouth of the river and then pointing to its mouth, they speak of it as the source.

After this the company file around the body, chanting a "hta" (poem) to the sun. In Siam it is the custom to march around to the left, making the circuit three times, after which the participants begin to recite the following version of this "hta," entitled "The Face of the Sun":

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

764 dry supplies. The members of the party who are impersonatin
524 women, go under the houses and pretend to catch fish in their net
By such methods they manage to gather all they can carry of frui
vegetables, and other kinds of food, which they consume on thei
return to the place where the funeral is being held. This ceremon
is performed more frequently when the bones of the deceased ar
exhumed than at the time of his death.

764 After the ordinary daylight observances and the chanting o
761 the poems in the evenings have been completed, the body is re
[342] moved through an opening made for the purpose in the side of th
house and is carried to the place where it is to be burned or buried
In the olden days it was usual to burn the body, but latterly burial
[559] is the common practice. The children used to be confined or tie
up at home during the removal of the corpse. This was to prevent
their being scared by the gruesome sight, thus causing their shade
or "k'las" to withdraw from their bodies and make them sick, o
to keep their "k'las" from being enticed to follow that of the dea
person with the same result.

764 In Siam three beds of leaves and twigs are made along th
775 path to the place of burning, the bearers stopping at these piles a
though to put down their burden and rest, but allowing it barely t
touch the bed when they raise it again and go on.

In those cases in which burning is resorted to, the body i
placed upon a pile of fagots three or four feet high and more woo
is piled on top. Dry bamboo torches are applied at two or mor
places and, after the fire is blazing, the body is pierced with lon
sharpened bamboos to allow the juices to exude and so hasten th
process of incineration. Before the body has been wholly consumed
charred pieces of the bones and particularly of the skull are rake
out, held near the fire, and addressed with the words: "If you ar
hot, sit by the fire." After this water is poured over them and the
are told, if cold, to bathe and drink water. These injunctions t
the bones again illustrate the curious conception on the part of th
Karen that the conditions prevailing in the next world are just th
reverse of those existing in the present one.

If the full funeral rites have been performed, the bones ar
ready to be deposited in the family burial-ground. If, however, th
cremation has taken place before the performance of the full cere
monies, the bones are usually placed in a basket or wrapped in a
cloth and taken home to be used again when the full rites are cele
brated. This carrying home of the relics and celebrating a funera

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

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776 offerings and ceremonies and were hoping for the return of the white brother with the Lost Book.

Beliefs Concerning the Soul and the Life Principle

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761 The Karen distinguish between the "tha" or soul and the "k'la" or life principle (shade) of every human being. They think of the soul as the seat of their moral nature, endowed with conscience, that is, the power of apprehending right and wrong, and with a personality that persists after death. The soul is responsible and is judged for the acts in the flesh. The "k'la" is more intimately associated with one's physical existence. It is the force that keeps one alive and well. As it is being constantly solicited by demons and more or less by the "k'las" of dead relatives to leave the body, it needs the protection of charms, offerings, and medicines.[13] As the "k' la" comes from a previous existence to inhabit the body at the time of birth and departs into a new existence at death, so also it leaves the body for brief periods and at frequent intervals, as during sleep. If it remains away longer than usual, its absence causes the sickness and even the death of
[513] the body. As the "k' la" may be away visiting friends or on other errands during the sleeping hours, it is not safe to waken a sleeper suddenly. His "k' la" may not have yet returned, in which case he could not long survive. One Karen told me that he had dreamed of seeing various persons in heaven and hell and naively remarked that his "k' la" must have journeyed to those abodes during his sleep. Another Karen, whose wife underwent a surgical operation at a hospital in the city, asked me whether the ether cone was not used to extract and hold her "k' la," in order to render her unconscious, the "k' la" being restored to her to enable her to regain her faculties. The "k' las" of children are supposed to be peculiarly susceptible to being enticed away by those of the dead. Hence, it is customary to tie children up in the house while a corpse is being carried out. I have experienced considerable difficulty in inducing the inhabitants of outlying villages to let me take their pictures, for fear their "k' las" would be carried off along with the photo-

[13] A full study of the Karen "k' la" and "tha" was made by the early missionaries to determine which of these two words should be used in translating the word, soul. "Tha" was the word finally chosen. The results of these studies are recorded, those of Dr. Wade, in *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, 442, ff, and those of Dr. Mason in the *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXX, Pt. II, 195, ff.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

graph.[14] In the early days when white men were still a strange sight to the people, they would beat their breasts and call their "k' las" to come back, evidently fearing that the latter would follow in curiosity after the strangers. A friend of mine had a similar experience among the Karen of Siam only a few years ago.

The people think that a wandering "k'la" may remain invisible or assume the form of the person himself. Stories are told of these wandering ghosts. A man who had been absent from his village met the apparition of his wife on his way home. It informed him that it was going to see its mother, but it consented to spend the night with him in the jungle. As they had no food, the ghost, which was supposed by the man to be his wife in person, went back to their house and took what food it wanted from the cooking pots, without revealing itself at all. Next morning the man and his ghostly wife took their separate paths, the former being greatly shocked on arriving in the village to find the burial rites of his wife in progress. Realizing that it was his wife's "k'la" which he had met in the jungle, he wished that he had called it back. Another story relates that a husband was so incensed at seeing his wife (the apparition being really her "k'la") wandering abroad that he struck her in the face. This act had the desired effect, for the "k' la" hastened back to its deserted body and thereby put an abrupt end to the funeral ceremonies, which were already in progress. This wandering propensity of the "k'la" leads to other complications than those already mentioned. The elders are authority for the statement that even though a couple are living together as man and wife, their "k' las" may form unions with those of other persons, especially during the hours of sleep. Even the efforts of a necromancer to summon the wandering "k' la" of a sick person may result in attracting the "k' la" of some other person to occupy the deserted body, in whose behalf the efforts are being put forth. The new occupant may remain only while generous offerings are made to it, and the sick person is sure to experience a serious relapse when it leaves.

It seems to be believed also that the "k' las" of human beings may take on other forms, such as those of insects. Animals have "k' las" which can do the same thing. Sometimes when moths are

[14] Sir J. G. Fraser quotes Dr. Nieuwenhuis, who tells of a similar experience among the people of Borneo: *Golden Bough*, Vol. III, p. 99. Some of the Karen object to having their photographs taken on account of their fear of sympathetic magic, that is, they fear that an accident to the photograph would cause a similar one to the original.

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

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flying about a light people say: "Let the 'k' las" of beasts and other creatures fall into the flame, but let the 'k' las' of men fly carefully and save themselves."

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Inanimate objects have their "k' las," as well as the lower creatures. Ownership in such possessions is duly observed by killing the pigs and fowls of a woman when she dies. The remains are thrown away or given to foreigners, who do not share the superstitions of the Karen. The paddy-cleaning implements and clothing of the deceased are either burned or buried with the corpse, unless they are laid on top of her grave. In like manner the oxen belonging to a man who has died are killed and disposed of, while his personal effects are burned or put in the grave with him. Otherwise, the owner's "k' la" might return to the village for his property and thereby bring calamity on the inhabitants.

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The idea seems to prevail among the Karen that the "k' las" enter and leave their bodies through the fontanel on the top of the head. In case a child falls and cries the mother will blow on this spot, in order to keep the life principle from escaping. However, the customary method of preventing the escape of the "k' la" is to tie a string around the wrists, either one or both of them, after fanning up the arms to blow the "k' la" back. Anybody may perform this act, but the services of elders or necromancers ("wi") are preferred.

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Another conception of the "k' la," quite distinct from that set forth above, is that it is a seven-fold spirit inhabiting the body, whose death it is constantly striving to accomplish through one or another of seven methods, namely, insanity, licentiousness, epilepsy, oppression, diseases, accidents, and injury by wild beasts. Even from the birth of a person the seven-fold "k' la" accepts the responsibility of causing his or her death and is engaged in constant struggle with that person's "so" (personality or character) for the mastery. As long as the "so" is strong, it serves as the individual's guardian angel; and he remains immune both from the attacks of the seven-fold "k' la" and from the magic arts of witches and necromancers. However powerful the charm that may be employed against him, his dominating "so" will ward it off; but if his "so" should become weak, he will soon lose his immunity.[15]

[15] See Dr. J. Wade's account in *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, pp. 450, ff.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

THE CONTINUITY OF LIFE

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The Karen do not appear to have conceived the idea of an immortal life. They speak of "k' las" in "plu" (hades) as dying, when the "k' las" are believed to entêr an intermediate stage of existence, becoming "sgheu." These "sgheu" are represented as something like eggs or bladders filled with a vaporous substance. When, later, these vapor-filled objects burst, their contents spread over the fields; and the developing flowers of the paddy and other plants are thereby fertilized, for the vapor contains the fructifying principle. When the grain is eaten as food, its life-giving power is communicated to the blood. Thence, it is imparted to the seminal fluid, by means of which men and animals are enabled to propagate life. The transmission of life from shades or ghosts back to life again is expressed in Karen speech by the root "lo," which signifies to expose or open one thing to the influence of another. Inasmuch as the fecundating of the paddy takes place in the rainy season, the "Law hpo," a company of demons who regulate the rainfall, are supposed to act as agents in bringing it about. When the kernels are forming in the heads of the paddy, the Karen are wont to say: "Bu deu htaw li," which means literally, "The paddy has conceived." [16]

[16] See Chapter XXII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 230.